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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

23 February 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable William P. Rogers
The Secretary of State

SUBJECT : The Situation in Vietnam

Attached is a summary memorandum on the Vietnam Situation drafted at 0500 EST, Sunday, 23 February and based on all information available at that time from our Vietnam Station and all other sources.



George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant For Vietnamese Affairs

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President
For National Security Affairs

SUBJECT : The Situation in Vietnam

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MEMORANDUM FOR: DCI.

Kissinger and Rogers each received a copy of the attached prior to departure for their perusal on the plane.

Bundy called at around 0630 to solicit such a piece (agitatedly) but when he called it was virtually done. Abrams has sent in a request for retaliation authorization, seconded by Bunker (Bunker's in your file). No decision to my knowledge as of 0730 Sunday.

(DATE) 

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

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23 February 1969

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Surge of Communist Offensive Activity in South Vietnam

I. OVERVIEW

1. The Situation Summarized. At approximately 0100 hours on Sunday, 23 February (Vietnam time: noon on 22 February in Washington) the Communists initiated an obviously coordinated series of over 160 attacks against province capitals, district towns, allied military bases and lines of communication throughout South Vietnam. Action within Saigon itself has so far been limited to a ten man sapper strike at a police substation in the outlying 9th precinct, plus light, scattered and indiscriminate mortar and rocket attacks against the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 9th precincts. (The 1st precinct is the heart of downtown Saigon, including the Palace, American Embassy and central business district.) Danang City has also been shelled, with an estimated six rockets impacting in the ammunition storage area of Danang East, with resultant heavy damage as the fire spread and explosions continued throughout the morning of 23 February. Contact was made with a sapper unit at 2230 hours on the night of 22 February with two sappers captured and four killed. Hue has reported no attacks on the city itself, though it did report the ambush (presumably nearby) of a Revolutionary Development team late in the afternoon of 22 February.

2. On the basis of information received as this is written, the action seems to have been heaviest in III and I corps and lightest in IV corps. The attacks have been predominately attacks by fire (mortar and/or rocket), with some ground force harassment and a few fairly serious ground probes. For example, Song Be, the capital of III corps' Phuoc Long province seems to have been partially over-run and the US Province Senior Advisor was killed (though whether by rockets or ground fire is not clear). An estimated VC company attacked downtown Bien Hoa City (III corps Headquarters) and the capital of Bien Hoa province). There is still fighting in Hoi An, capital of I corps' Quang Nam province.

* This Memorandum is based on information available in CIA's Washington Headquarters at 0500 EST, Sunday, 23 February 1969.

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In several instances, the attacks were thrown off base at allied action (e.g. Bien Hoa, where ARVN successfully blocked the apparent VC reinforcement unit) or sloppy execution (e.g. II corps, where on some occasions 40 or 50 rounds of mortar fire against selected targets resulted in no damage). Our information is presently too fragmentary to permit meaningful damage or casualty assessments, but in all reported instances (with a few exceptions), the Communist attacks to date seem to have been contained, coped with or handled with relative ease.

3. The Immediate Future. Allied intelligence had the onset of these attacks pegged almost to the hour and so far their scale and scope have generally followed the estimated pattern. The Communist effort will almost certainly continue over at least the next 48 to 72 hours and some serious attempts at ground force investiture will almost certainly be essayed, most likely against outlying III corps targets such as Tay Ninh City. Further mortar/rocket harassment, augmented by attempts at sapper or terrorist activity, can be anticipated in Saigon. Danang and probably Hue. The Communists are practicing economy of force tactics thusfar, however, and the extent of their actual total effort will be heavily influenced by COSVN's reading of the success (or lack thereof) of its initial efforts and the openings or opportunities developing therein.

4. The GVN Reaction. The GVN reaction at the national and (generally) the local level so far seems to be cool, professional and confident. President Thieu is reported to be fishing. No particular concern was expressed at the 23 February Joint Operations Center briefing in Saigon. Senior Vietnamese Police officials in Saigon stated that as of 1015 hours on 23 February they regarded the attacks on Saigon to be low level harassment with more to come. These officers were confident they could handle the situation in terms of Saigon's internal security.

5. Communist Objectives. The full range of Communist objectives can not be discerned until we see the full scope of their intended offensive. The attacks thus far launched, the intelligence on troop movements and deployments of recent weeks and other indicators such as Liberation Radio's 19 February call to urban revolutionary arms all collectively suggest that the Communists want to go as far as they can toward re-creating in South Vietnam and in the US the mood and atmosphere of post-Tet 1968. They

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want to demonstrate the continued potency and power of Communist arms and erase the image of allied progress projected by events since last fall. They want to exacerbate tensions and concern within South Vietnam, build a mood of defeatism, and--probably above all--induce the new US administration to draw the "correct" conclusion from current events, i.e., that allied progress will be forever illusory and continued US prosecution of the struggle will produce nothing but longer casualty lists. In launching even a limited offensive to achieve these ends, however, the Communists are perforce taking the gamble of failing in a manner which will produce an effect on Vietnamese and American opinion adverse to Communist interests.

II. THE TACTICAL SITUATION

6. Preliminary figures gleaned from our Station and MACV reports indicate that the Communists struck wide, far, and in some cases with a great deal of severity. By Corps, the breakout of attacks reported so far appears to be as follows:

7. I Corps - At least 18 attacks by fire occurred in this corps. Major targets were Da Nang Air Base, Marble Mountain, and the Da Nang deep water pier area. Several large fires were started in POL storage areas and ammunition supply points in Da Nang and the Da Nang AB. Additionally, Hoi An, and Chu Lai have been attacked with Hoi An coming under heavy fire and a substantial ground attack, which was still in progress as of our last report. Numerous military outposts were also hit by enemy standoff attacks.

8. II Corps - The enemy has confined himself, so far, to indirect fire attacks against military installations and outposts. In at least 13 such attacks, he has caused only moderate damage and loss of life.

9. III Corps - No fewer than 23 attacks against military installations and population centers have occurred since 1400 Feb EST on 22 February. Saigon received two shellings -- at 1330 EST three mortar rounds hit in the 9th Precinct near the GVN naval headquarters and at 1530 EST nine rounds of 122-mm. rocket impacting in the 4th and 9th precincts. Rounds are also reported (without details) in the 2nd precinct. Human and property losses were minimal. There was also a ground attack against a police sub-station in the 9th precinct, the only ground action reported within the city limits. Several scattered ground probes were reported in

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the Capital Military District some up to company size, but none were close to the city boundary.

10. Elsewhere in III Corps, there were moderate to heavy attacks by fire and ground probes. Song Be the capital of Phuoc Long Province was hit by an unknown size enemy force and the MA CV compound was overrun. The Senior MACV advisor and one advisor were killed and six others wounded in this action. In Binh Duong Province, two battalion probe preceded by a mortar barrage was launched against the 3rd Brigade Headquarters of the 25th Division near Dau Tieng. The perimeter of the camp was breached twice, but the attackers repelled. The contact continues. The Long Binh camp base in Bien Hoa Province was hit by a mixed barrage of 78 rockets and 82-mm. mortars, followed by a ground probe. Some 10 Communists penetrated the defenses. Contact ceased at an unknown time and the area south of the installation is being swept. Enemy losses are at least 20 killed with friendly casualties placed at 5 killed and 71 wounded (63 US).

11. The Bien Hoa AB was hit by an enemy barrage of enemy fire from undetermined weapons. Losses at the base included the destruction of one light aircraft and one F-100, and the apparent destruction of a liquid oxygen plant. In Bien Hoa town, a local force platoon attempted to overrun the national police station. The attack was aborted by friendly reinforcements who currently have the enemy unit surrounded.

12. IV Corps - Nearly 60 incidents were recorded in the IV Corps zone with no ground attacks against major strong points. My Tho, capital of Dinh Tuong Province received approximately 100 rounds of 88 and 120-mm. mortar fire--apparently without causing significant damage or loss of life. At Cau Ke, a district town in western Vinh Binh Province, the enemy penetrated the town and currently has the defenders trapped in the district headquarters compound. Except for the incidents at My Tho and Cau Ke the incidence of enemy action is considered normal for the corps zone.